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ABSTRACT

Hong Kong has always been proud of its economic achievement of the past decades. However, the economic turmoil that swept over East Asia has revealed the weakness in its economy, which, in turn, urges Hong Kong to reform its education system to meet the challenge of this era of information technology. There are many problems in Hong Kong's education system, including elitism, teacher-centered classrooms, outdated curricula, and ambiguous language policies. At the same time, Hong Kong is faced with fierce competition with its neighboring cities, notably Shanghai and Singapore. There is concern that Hong Kong cannot produce the suitable manpower to meet the needs of the changing economy. Reform proposals were first introduced in May 2001, with "student-focused learning," "no-loser," "quantity," "life-long learning," and "society-wide mobilization" as guiding principles. This paper aims at examining the reform proposals, their problems and possibilities, and their implications through contextual analysis and literature review. The significance of Hong Kong's education reform may help shed some light on education reform in other parts of the world facing similar problems in the process of rapid economic and social change. (Contains 40 references.) (RT)

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Education Reform in Hong Kong and the Paradigm Shift

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Abstract

Hong Kong has always been proud of her economic achievement of the past decades. However, the economic turmoil, which has swept over East Asia, has revealed the weakness in her economy, which in turn urges Hong Kong to reform her education in order to meet the challenge of this era of information technology. There are many problems in Hong Kong's education, for example, elitism, teacher-centered classroom, outdated curriculum and ambiguous language policy. At the same time, Hong Kong is faced with fierce competition with her neighboring cities, notably Shanghai and Singapore. There is a worry that Hong Kong cannot produce the suitable manpower to meet the needs of the changing economy. The reform proposals were first introduced in May, 2001, with "student-focused learning", "no-loser", "quantity", "life-wide learning" and "society-wide mobilization" as the guiding principles. The aim of the reform is to build a lifelong learning society, to raise the overall quality of students, to construct a diverse school system, to create an inspiring learning environment, to acknowledge the importance of moral education and to develop an education system that is rich in tradition but cosmopolitan and culturally diverse. The reform is focused on the following issues: the admission systems and public examinations, the curricula and the teaching method. Policies are to be established in providing more diverse opportunities for lifelong learning, formulating an effective resource strategy, enhancing the professionalism of teachers and implementing measures to support frontline educators. All these changes call for a paradigm shift in the mentality of the education planners, teachers, parents and students. This paper aims to examine the reform proposals and their implications through contextual analysis and literature review. The problems and possibilities are also discussed. The significance of Hong Kong's education reform may help to shed some lights to education reforms in other parts of the world facing with similar problems in the process of rapid economic and social changes.

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Introduction

Education embodies a society's vision and hope for the future. The development of Hong Kong is closely related to her development in education. To meet these challenges, Hong Kong has to reform her education system so as to prepare her younger generation for the new millennium. These reforms call not only for a change in the education policies, the curriculum and pedagogy, the admissions systems and teacher education, but a paradigm shift in the concept of education. This paper attempts to analyze the reform proposals and the paradigm shift underlying these proposals.

This paper begins by summarizing the concept of education from different perspectives and from both the Western and Chinese viewpoints. Then the background to Hong Kong's education reform is introduced and the key issues of the reform document highlighted. An analysis of the paradigm shift underlying the reform proposals is then undertaken, taking into consideration the social and economic changes of Hong Kong. The conclusion is that the reform proposals are aiming at adapting Hong Kong's education to the social and economic changes in par with globalization. It is believed that in a pluralistic society as Hong Kong, success in education reforms depends on reaching a consensus about what we want our children to be, what we want them to learn and how we want them to learn.

The western view on values in education

R.S. Peters, defined education as the initiation into worthwhile activities in developing a capacity to know, to understand, to engage critically and intelligently from a broadly balanced point of view (Peters, 1966). Education is an evaluative term in which the educational activities or educated people always carry some positive connotations in that they are good, that they merit approval and are deserving of praise. Education embodies certain values that are used to refer as principles, fundamental conviction, ideals, standards or life stances and which act as general guides to behavior or as points of reference in decision-making or the evaluation of beliefs or action (Print, 1996, p.111). Values are central to both the theory of education and the practical activities of schools (Stephenson, et al., 1998). Education reflects and embodies the values of a society and seeks to exert influence its future development. At the same time, in designing and implementing the education policies, there is always an interplay of political, social, economic, religious, ideological and cultural values from the different groups within a society – parents, employers, politicians, local communities, leaders of industry and taxpayers, as well

teachers and children themselves.

The significance of education can be viewed from different perspectives. Behind every educational program and most educational decisions, there is a set of assumptions about what constitutes a good life, a good person, and a good society. There are many schools of thoughts in the conception of education. Take just a few examples. functionalism views society as an interrelated set of institutions each performing specialized functions that allow the society to survive and benefit members of a society (Dougherty & Hammack, 1990, p.13-15). Liberalism views education as having three fundamental values: individual liberty, equality of respect for all individuals and consistent rationality (Halstead, 1996, p.18). Essentialism regards the values of education in its conservation of the best of the traditions of a particular society as well as in promoting the intellectual growth of the individual (Scott, et.al.1991, p.72) Progressivism and reconstructionalism both seek to combat the political and economic evils of industrial society. To them, democracy is the highest value that can be manifested in our way of living and that lays in democratic education (ibid., p.74-77). Postmodernism, on the other hand, calls for variety, diversity and integration, creativity and critical thinking in education curriculum and school practices (Ozmon & Craver, 1990).

In the social perspective, education is important for maintaining the cohesiveness of a society by transmitting a common culture. Education is valued to play a part in helping to preserve the status quo by reproducing culture and social structure. It also provides channels for social mobility, thus contributing to the stability of the society. (Dougherty & Hammack, 1990; Scotter, p.108). At the same time, education can be a tool for social control. It can be used for the promotion of an individual's or group's interests by use of such resources such as power, money, jobs, information, status, and prestige. In a way, the education system (curriculum, purposes/philosophy, programs of study, certification, administration, pedagogical methods, materials, organizational structure, teachers, students, co-workers) is the interplay of political power within society (Scotter, pp.130-135)

In the political perspective, in all societies, education is a device that those in power, be it the administrators, the politicians or businessmen used to maintain their hold on individual through the credentialing or certifying process. It is a means to keep the young within the confines of school environment and is also a sorting machine for fitting people to different job categories. It is a process to discriminate the high achievers from the low achiever, the fit from the unfit. In the economic perspective schools are to maintain the quality of education that would ensure a talented and trained work force to meet the changing economy. Hence education is concerned with the economic development and a human investment – a way to produce manpower for the society. Education costs money and is a process undertaken by individuals to promote their skills to earn money, thus adding to economic growth (Scotter, el. al., pp.159 -168 ; Johns, et al., p.534).

Traditional Chinese view on education

Confucianism still has great influence in the mind of Hong Kong people. The Chinese always pays great respect to education. Confucius himself had been a teacher for many years. He was therefore very concerned about the role of education in transforming a person's mind. To him, the goal of education is to produce the gentleman (*juan zhe*) who has observed the cardinal virtues: *Jen* (humanity), *Li* (propriety), *Hsiao* (filial piety), *I* (Righteousness) and *Chi* (shame). *Jen* is the appropriate relationship between two men. It is a summation of all virtues and a man who practices *jen* is a morally educated. *Li* is proper behavior and in observing the institutional framework of ritualism. *I* (Righteousness) is to act according to what is right and proper. *Chi* (shame) is associated with a lapse of responsibility, often accompanied by insult, estrangement, and humiliation at the hand of others.

In a Confucius culture, a morally educated man feels a sense of shame when he believes himself to be unable to live up to the obligations of his class. This sense of shame, frequently referred to as 'loss of face', is one of the most outstanding features of Chinese culture. Filial piety emphasizes on the uniqueness of family and the foundation of human relationship. It is the responsibility of family members to honor the family and make it prosper. A person should put his family's interest before his own interest, and conversely, to put family interest before society's interest.

Confucius stresses the importance of education for helping a person to acquire empirical knowledge. It is not simply a method of internalizing the proper manner of behavior in society. Education is to deepen a person's knowledge about how to be human, to transform his life into meaningful existence. Learning signifies a new and continuous process of intellectual and moral growth and the establishment of one's character (Legge, 1897).

Mencius, the disciple of Confucius was aware of environmental influence on a person's psychological milieu. At the same time, he was also confident in men's inner strength to rejuvenation. To him, the establishment of the will is all that is needed to preserve a man's integrity. He therefore insisted on self-cultivation, which means that a person has to follow an appropriate moral standard of society and the practice of self-denial of instincts and desires (Legge,1897).

As a legacy of Confucianism, the Chinese have always recognized the importance of education for their children. There is a Chinese saying that goes "nothing is as valuable as book reading". Most Chinese parents believe that education will contribute to their children's future. This dates from the early times when civil examinations were the only channels for social mobility.

Confucianism divided people into classes according to their morality. In Hong Kong,

a man's moral status does not count for much. It is the accumulation of wealth that determines a person's status (Lau, 1983). Social mobility is achieved through the accumulation of wealth. There are always possibilities of moving upward so long as one is hard working enough. This is a way of "self cultivation", that is, a man can perfect himself by his own effort. Such a mentality is demonstrated in the education arena where examination provides the opportunities for people to move up the social class, vexing personal power and accumulate wealth. Examination is first introduced in China thousands of years ago. The Chinese has always relied on public examinations for selection of the able people to fill up the civil service. The Chinese do not believe in inborn abilities. They believe that by working hard (and with a piece of luck), everyone can have the chance to gain power and wealth through passing examinations. Also through passing examinations, one can bring glory to one's parents and family and it is the responsibility of everybody to honour one's family (Lau. 1978).

At the same time, the "face culture" also affects Hong Kong people's concept of education. The Chinese concept of face means the perception of one's own worth as rated by significant others. "Face" or standing can be gained, lost, saved, or threatened. A student's achievement in examination is crucial to his "face" and is an important component of his self concept (Sweeting, 1983, p.272). The parents' "face" is also directly links to the examination results of their children. Also if a child can get a place in an elite school, his parents will feel a gain of face. If a student's achievement fails the expectation of his parents, he will feel so ashamed as to commit suicide. Because of the above mentality, students in our schools are under enormous pressure to work hard. Failure will mean loss of face and a degeneration of self worth. In our schools there are many "losers" and students have little joy in learning and education is mainly valued for its extrinsic values. Not many people in Hong Kong will continue their learning after getting the required credentials.

The Chinese believe in effort rather than innate ability. They believe that through study hard, a student can attain good achievement. Therefore conscientiousness, hard-work, dedication and steadfastness are the core values for success in education. Obedience to school authority and school regulations are also emphasized (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987;Leung, 1992; Cheng, 1995; Lee, 1996).

Background of education reform

In the fifties and sixties, there was a large influx of refugees to Hong Kong from China. In the seventies and eighties, Hong Kong experienced an almost miraculous growth in its economy. Rapid progress in economy in the past decades has also resulted in rapid progress in educational development. In 1974 Education was made universal and compulsory to all children aged 6-14 (Education Department, 1973). In 1977, free

education was available to 6-15 age group children (Education Department, 1977). An allocation system known as the Secondary School Places Allocation System (SSPA) was introduced to allocate primary six children to secondary schools in terms of their ability bandings. English has been the medium of instruction for most of the secondary schools with the School Certificate Examination taken by all form 5 students. In addition, there is the Advance Level Examination taken by all Form 7 students before admissions to university.

Our education system is intertwined with a number of problems.

The language issue

The language problem is deeply rooted in Hong Kong. Since the founding of the colony, the Hong Kong government has deliberately promoted English education in Hong Kong. English is the medium of instruction for the majority of secondary schools and most post-secondary institutes. Despite exposure to English teaching, many of our students do not show a very good standard in English. The problem is further complicated by the fact that their written language (Putonghua or standard language) is different form their spoken language, Cantonese. In fact, a school child in Hong Kong has to learn three languages, that is, Cantonese (which their everyday spoken language), standard Chinese and English (which is the medium of instruction in the majority of secondary schools).

In Hong Kong, a mastery of English means greater ability for earning money. This is why many parents want their children to have good English. But the problem is that the use of English as the medium of instruction has deprived children of the chance of a good education because not many children are able to cope with English. They have to rely on memories, rather than engaging in some other more meaningful activities when studying in school. In this way, students fail to develop their sense of curiosity, imagination or love of learning, which are important aspects of education (Llywellyn, 1982;Cheng, 1983; Pun, 1997).

Examination pressure

Children in Hong Kong had to undergo many examinations in their school life. Teachers have got used to having examination syllabi as their teaching guides and the proportion of children to pass public examination becomes their goal of teaching. Examination has become their chief weapons to motivate or control their children. School supervisors and administrators also rely on examination as the disciplinary device for both students and teachers. Businessmen and employers select their future employers by looking at heir certificates. In Hong Kong, there is a close relationship between academic achievement and getting better-paid jobs. Education is valued for the economic benefits it

bestows rather than for personal enrichment. People in Hong Kong desire more education because of the socio-economic benefits it will bring.

Education, instead of promoting all round development of children, now functions purely as a selection process for elites. Graduates of the elite schools become members of the elite circle and they were chosen for jobs reserved for the elitists. When education is to gain credentials, schools become the avenue to future earnings. The prestige of a school is directly linked to its public examination results. Hence students compete for better credentials and schools compete for admitting the most academically able students. Developing independent judgments, creativity and originality are not important when examinations emphasize only academic achievements based on reproduction of facts (Llywellyn, 1982).

Teaching method and the curriculum

The curriculum in Hong Kong is characterized by an emphasis on factual knowledge, which is easier to assess objectively, but it has long been criticized as being detrimental to the overall educational process because it "encourages memorizing and rote learning and does not induce creative and critical thinking, enquiry, initiative, imagination, or aesthetic appreciation" (Morris, 1990) With crowded classrooms, very full syllabuses of work and the pressure of examination, most local teachers in Hong Kong can give no more than lip service to more vivid modes of teaching and classroom activities in order to meet better the social and emotional needs of their pupils. The teacher's concern is to impart knowledge. Not only are there few opportunities for learning activities, which encourage self-discovery or experimentation, there is even little attention paid to children who have difficulty in their studies. Students are usually very passive. Teacher seldom asks high-order questions to prompt students to think. The majority of the tasks required pupils to answer recall-type questions. Students are not trained to enquire, analyze and draw conclusions for themselves. Their main task is to listen to the teachers; copy notes memorize and reproduce them during examinations (Llywellyn, 1982; Morris, 1990).

The competitive school atmosphere

In Hong Kong, competition to get a place in higher education is very competitive. In the year 1999- 2000, more than 80,000 students are scrambling through the HKCEE taken at the end of Form Five for about 23,000 places for the sixth and seventh form years. Only 18 percent of the population aged between 18 and 20 can be admitted to university.

In Hong Kong, education is for prestige. Learning is for earning. The hidden curriculum is the keen competition. Just as there is cutthroat competition in trade and business, education is characterized by the "pyramid of credentials", which is achieved by selection, examination and competition. Those who cannot keep up with the others are left

out of the game.

When there are winners, there are certainly losers. There is no mercy in the race. It is thought that those who lose will be deemed to lose everything – their credentials and their future. This atmosphere of competition permeates the entire educational system. Also, the school atmosphere is punitive. There are many school regulations followed by a meticulous system of punishment and reward. Students are always aloof to their schools and teachers.

School failure

There is a general feeling that the standard of our students are falling. Our language ability is behind that of Singapore and Korea. Our other subjects, Mathematics and Science are also lagging behind. Each year, students' results in the Certificate Examination are largely disappointing. Also, there are many drop-outs from our secondary school (The Hong Kong Playground Association, 1998). Many research reports also show that our students lack self-confidence and are not creative. There is a great concern that our schools are not producing the manpower to meet the new economy.

The reform document

In 1984, four overseas experts were selected by the Secretariat of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to form a panel to carry out an overall view of the Hong Kong education. One of the major recommendations was the setting up of the Education Commission for considering the proposals of the Report and put them into implementation (Llwellyn, 1982). Until now, the Education Commission had issued seven reports, each dealing with some major issues of our education system. After the changeover of the sovereignty, the Joint Declaration guarantees that Hong Kong as a Special Administrative Region under China, shall be on it own decide policies in the field of education and other cultural matters (Government Printer, 1984). This may mean that Hong Kong is in a better position now than in the past to redress the problems and tackle the major education issues. In 1995, the Target Oriented- Curriculum was first introduced. In 1999, there came the controversial decision that the majority of secondary schools have to switch to using Chinese as the medium of instruction at the junior level.

Since 1998, the Education Commission started an overall review of Hong Kong's education system and came up with the proposals for education reform including the curricula, the academic structure and the assessment mechanism at various, as well as the interface between different stages of education. Owing to the wide-ranging and complicated issues involved, the review was conducted in three phases and there was wide public consultation at the different stage.

Phase I: Aims of education in the 21st century

Phase II: Direction and overall framework for reforming the education system

Phase III: Proposals for the reform of the education system

Key areas of the reform proposals of 2000

The reform proposals are very comprehensive ranging from the admissions system to information technology and covering all levels of education from early childhood to university. The Education Commission has the following vision when drafting the reform document:

- To build a lifelong learning society.
- To raise the overall quality of students
- To construct a diverse school system
- To create an inspiring learning environment
- To acknowledge the importance of moral education
- To develop an education system that is rich in tradition but cosmopolitan and culturally diverse. (Education Commission, 2000, p.5)

The principles of the reform are "student-focused", "no-loser", "quality", "life-wide learning" and "society-wide mobilization".

The Commission also has focused the reform on the following issues:

- Reforming the admission systems and public examinations so as to break down barriers and create room for all
- Reforming the curricula and improving teaching methods;
- Improving the assessment mechanism to supplement learning and teaching;
- Providing more diverse opportunities for lifelong learning at senior secondary level and beyond;
- Formulating an effective resource strategy;
- Enhancing the professionalism of teachers; and
- Implementing measure to support frontline educators (ibid, p.6)

Direction of the reform: the paradigm shift

Meeting the new economic challenges

The Education Commission is answerable to the Chief executive. It is endowed with the responsibility for reviewing Hong Kong's education. The Education Commission has set up two working groups and nine sub-groups bringing in a pool of over a hundred experienced educators and members of the public to participate in the review. This reflects

that the government wants to strike a balance between the different interests of Hong Kong society.

In his administration of Hong Kong, Mr. Tung Chee Wah has depended on influential members of the business community for advice and support. Education is of no exception. The business community feels that the present educational system is failing to produce people capable of sustaining Hong Kong's economic progress. Mr. Anthony Leung, himself is a prominent banker, tries to make the Commission a very active catalyst for change. Thus the Education Commission's reform proposals may mainly reflect the values of the business community who views education as manpower investment.

At the same time, the Commission has collected information on the development of education systems elsewhere and commissioned comparative studies in specific areas as references (ibid, p.2.). Therefore reform experiences from other countries have influenced the principles and content of the reform proposals. The education planners are well aware of the importance of education to the society and the economy, and that it is crucial for education to change in accordance with the changing society.

Mr. Anthony Leung has spelled out that "Learning is the key to one's future, and Education is the gateway to our society's tomorrow" (ibid, Foreword)". To him and other planners of the education reform,

> Education nurtures talents for the society and promotes its prosperity and progress. In an ever-changing society, it is imperative that our education system keeps pace with the times and be responsive to the needs of learners. To design an education system for the future, we must envision future changes in the society in order to cater for the needs of learners in the new society and to define the role and functions of education in the new environment (ibid, p.27).

The Education Commission members see the main role of education as developing and sustaining the new economy. This view is echoed and reiterated throughout the reform proposals. In the same page, the importance of preparation for the new economy is underscored.

The world is undergoing fundamental economic, technological, social and cultural changes.

> The world economy is in the midst of a radical transformation, and the industrial economy is gradually being replaced by the knowledge-based economy. Industries that rely on cheap labor are giving way to emerging industries founded on knowledge, technology and innovation. Rapid

> organizations, multi-layered management and strict division of labor are being displaced by lean management structures; stream lined networks a flexible staffing. The creation, updating and application of knowledge have become the key to the success of industries, organization and individuals (ibid , p.27)

This restructuring in our economy calls for new human resources and therefore we have to redesign our education to meet the changing needs

> To view from a human resource angle, there are new requirements for "human resource' in a knowledge-based society. Strict division of labor and multi-layered structures which are typical of industrialized societies are being displaced by indistinct division of labor and fast-changing organization structures. To solve problems that people may encounter both in life and work, very often multi-faceted analytical skills as well as knowledge in multiple disciplines will be required. Thus despite the development of increasing specialization of knowledge and skills, what the society needs is not narrow and over-specialized people. What we need is a person who has a broad knowledge base and are capable of grasping new knowledge and skills at work (ibid, p110).

From the above remarks and elaborations, we can safely conclude that as in the past, our education system is still largely market-oriented and utilitarian in nature. The message from the reform document is crystal clear that if we do not change our education system, we will not be able to produce suitable manpower to meet the new economy based on information and technology. Hong Kong is aware of the keen competition from other Asian countries, notably Shanghai and Singapore. She is also aware of the fact that she is behind others in her development of hi-tech industries. If Hong Kong does not want to lose her status as the financial center and an international city, she has to change. Otherwise Hong Kong will only be a second-rate city at the periphery of Southern china

It is interesting to compare Hong Kong's sense of urgency and pessimism with those of the United States in the 1980s. The United States felt she is "a nation risk" – that she has been left behind other countries in the academic achievements of her students and this would adversely affect her status as a super power.

In the 1990s when the world is entering the era of information technology, Hong Kong feels threatened because other cities in Asia notably Singapore and Shanghai are outdoing Hong Kong the area of development of high tech. economy. It is hoped that the education reform highlighting the paradigm shift will bring about the favorable conditions for Hong Kong to become "a diverse, democratic, civilized, tolerant, dynamic and cultured cosmopolitan city" (ibid, p.1)

Liberalizing the education practices

The reform proposals also put much attention on curriculum reform in that it should be become more flexible, diversified and integrated. At the same time, the timetable should be made more flexible, too. The use of or more diverse teaching materials are encouraged. There is also a call for the integration of all-round learning activities both inside and outside the classroom. It is hoped that through inspiriting teaching methods and diversified assessment mechanism, students will become more proactive in their learning, and they will "learn how to learn" (Education Commission, 2000, pp.57-59)

The reform proposals call for a more student-centred teaching approach and a more integrated school curriculum. This is in line with the view of progressivism that that children should learn from experience and should be interactive with their environment for building their knowledge.

To counteract the stress of our examination-oriented system, the reform proposals have proclaimed "no losers" and "the joy of learning" as the core principles. A 'through train' system is proposed to pair up with primary school with a sister secondary school. The 21 years old Secondary School Places System is to be abolished. Secondary school will also be restructured and the school certificate examination revised. Community colleges will be set up and it is anticipated more than 60 percent of young people can be admitted to universities.

However, parents are worried that the proposals may deprive their children the opportunity to study in elite schools especially those that use English as the medium of instruction. The employers are worried that university now no longer guarantees the quality control of the graduates. Here we see the dichotomy of values: equalitarianism versus elitism, quantity versus quantity, society needs versus personal needs. These conflicting values need to be addressed in order that the reforms can be put in practice.

The paradigm shift

The reform proposals are to overhaul the entire education system of Hong Kong. It is indeed a paradigm shift from the conception of an industrial society to a knowledge-based society. While Confucianism is influencing our way of learning and teaching, our education system exhibit more the characteristics of an industrial and capitalistic society. The credentials chase for academic qualifications may reflect more the demand of competitive capitalist society than the pragmatism of Confucian teaching. Also much of our problems in education are related to the sociological changes under rapid modernization and urbanization. Such a shift is revealed by the remarks in various parts of the proposals:

> The world is undergoing unprecedented changes, and Hong Kong is no exception We are seeing substantial changes in the economic structure and the knowledge-based economy here to stay. Hong Kong is also facing tremendous challenges posed by a globalized economy.... Our social structure is fast evolving and there is an urgent need to alleviate the disparity of wealth. The society is adapting its culture and mind frame to these changes. The rapid development of information technology has opened up new domains in all aspects of lives and creating new challenges (ibid, p.3).

Professor Cheng Kai-ming is even more vocal in this point.

> Our society was transforming from an industrial society to a knowledge-based society. This could be seen from the steady growth of the service industry, which last year comprised 85 percent of the economy. Our society requires everyone to be knowledgeable so that they all have the competitiveness. With the emergence of the Internet, knowledge was now fast-changing, easily accessible and would provide people with greater and wider interfaces with different people. When students' expectations and needs are not in line with that of society, when society can't find fulfillment in students, education reform is bound to come (Hong Kong Standard, 6/10/1999)

Cheng, in his key-note speech to an international conference reiterates his points by declaring that "Schools and formal education in general has to seek a new identification. That will be the basic task of education reform at this time of human history (Education Commission, p.11).

This "new identification" forms the backbone of the reform proposals.

> People's lives are also undergoing momentous changes. Most jobs require a considerable amount of knowledge, which needs to be constantly updated. As the job requirement change, people nowadays need to master knowledge in different domains. Therefore, in a knowledge-based society, people must keep on learning. Many countries have already adopted "life-long learning" as their national policies and have made it their priority has to provide life-long learning opportunities for their people.
>
> Rapid developments in information technology have removed the boundaries and territorial constraints for trade, finance, transport and communication. As communication links become globalizes, competition also globalizes (ibid,

p.27).

As Hong Kong is striding from an industrial society to a knowledge-based society, it is just logical that the reform proposals call for shift to a new culture in learning and teaching.

- Shifting from transmission to learning how to learn
- Shifting from over-emphasizing academic studies to focusing on whole-person development
- Shifting from compartmentalized subjects to integrand learning
- Shifting the focus from textbook to diversified learning and teaching materials
- Support from the community and learning beyond the confines of the classroom
- From traditional time-tabling to an integrated and flexible arrangement of learning time
- Abolishing premature streaming and providing more opportunities for students to explore their aptitudes and potentials (ibid, p.60)

The reform document calls not only a change in the curriculum or teaching method but a paradigm shift in the overall concept and the design of education. This is in line with the principles of " student-focused", "no-loser", "quality", "life-wide learning" and "society-wide mobilization". Only with a new mind frame can Hong Kong be ready to take bold and confident steps into the new era. Education is to shape the mind frame of the Hong Kong's young people.

Conclusion

While the world is undergoing rapid technological advances in the last decades, it brings a kind of "future shock". As predicted in the book "The Third Wave", the technological advances has brought with it rapid changes in our economy, our life pattern, our working and leisure habits, our ways of communication, our family, our society and our way of thinking. To meet with these changes, our education system has to be reformed. As the United States. is one of the first human societies to enter into the era of information and technology, it is also among the first countries to feel "at risk" and calls for education reform to attain educational excellence. This has inaugurated the education reform movement in the eighties and the nineties. Many countries, Great Britain, Japan, China, Singapore and others have introduced their education reform. For the Americans and the British, their excellence is achieved through going back to the basics and the common core curriculum and setting up a standard for attainment. For Singapore and Hong Kong where students are hard-pressed in their examination, there is a call for new visions in which students should be encouraged for active learning and independence of thinking.

Since there are many similarities between Hong Kong and Singapore, I hence conclude my paper by quoting from the Singaporean experience. In his paper of Reflections on Recent Education Reform Initiatives in Singapore, Jason Tan (2000, pp 210-213) has listed five tensions in the process of education reform.

- tension between conservatism and innovation
- tension between competition and collaboration
- tension between diversity and uniformity
- tension between priorities of the policymakers and the front-line workers
- tension between elitism and equity

These five tensions are indeed tensions of a paradigm shift. Tan points out that unless these tensions are resolved, "the story of implementation of these initiatives, vital though they may be, will therefore be one of mixed results and unintended consequences rather than one of resounding success" (ibid., p.213).

Cheng Kai Ming observed that education in Hong Kong, particularly the stated education philosophies, which are shared by most teacher trainers and education advocates, often represent the western end of the balance. Parents and the grassroots, and the society at large, still bear with them the traditional values of education" (Cheng, 2000, p.199) Whether education reform can bring about the desired results, depends to a large extent, on whether the paradigm shift can be observed and carried through. An analysis of the paradigm shift in the conception of the education reform will help us to know their real significance and meaning of the reform. If there is no consensus on how we conceive and implement our education, all changes will only be cosmetic, as we have seen many such examples in the past.

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